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ORNITHOLOGICAL MISCELLANY FROM AUDUBON WARDENS.¹

BY B. S. BOWDISH.

IT IS my purpose to give here a few of the notes of interest gathered from letters and reports of wardens. Such notes are some of the incidental results of the warden system of the National Association of Audubon Societies.

BROWN PELICANS.—Brown Pelicans, on Pelican Island, Florida, started nesting nearly a month ahead of the usual time, or the first

¹ A paper presented to the American Ornithologists' Union, Cambridge, Mass. November 19, 1908.

week in November. At one time in January there were about 1000 occupied nests. A severe storm and high tide struck them in February; the birds first hatched were just able to fly; the rest were destroyed, the water making a clean sweep over the island. Of 2500 not over 600 escaped. Later about 75 nests were built but for some unknown reason they abandoned the island without hatching.—*Paul Krogel*, Pelican Island Reservation, Florida, Sept. 9, 1907.

This has been the most successful season the birds have had since the island was made a reservation. A good many birds died in February through cold and exposure during stormy weather, otherwise the total would have been from six to eight hundred larger. The second brood came through very well; they can all fly with the exception of about 30. There are about 1000 birds on the island now, young and old. The second brood numbers between six and seven hundred birds, most of which are still around the island. This season puts the island ahead of what it used to be years ago, as there were certainly more birds than I have ever seen on it before. There will probably be birds on the island until nesting starts again, unless a storm drives them off.—*Paul Krogel*, Pelican Island Reservation, Florida, Sept. 1, 1908.

ROSEATE SPOONBILL.—Five years ago there was a fine flock of Roseate Spoonbills or “Pink Curlews” that used and did their feeding in the northeast end of Turtle Bay; only 18 are left now of the flock, and they have for the past two seasons done their feeding on my home island in the fall and winter months. Hunters and tourists killed them, and there are but few left on the Gulf coast of Florida.—*Columbus G. McLeod*, Sunset Island, Florida, 1907.

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN.—A small flock of White Pelicans fed during the winter and early spring months in the northeast end of Gasparilla Sound. There were about 50, but they are decreasing from shooting for wings, feathers and for mounting. Nearly all the birds except pelicans and cormorants go to the main land to feed.—*Columbus G. McLeod*, Sunset Island, Florida, 1907.

BLACK SKIMMERS.—Black Skimmers began nesting three weeks earlier than in 1906.—*Asa M. Pillsbury, Jr.*, Passage and Indian Keys Reservations, Florida, 1907.

There was heavy weather on the 19th of April which destroyed

about three quarters of the nests and eggs of the Skimmers, also some of the young birds. There was left after the storm enough nests to produce say 6000 young ones. All the young of all broods are now able to take care of themselves.—*Adam Thibodeaux*, East Timbalier Island Reservation, Louisiana, July 8, 1908.

Young Skimmers are disturbed if people visit the Reservation. They lie quiet upon the first approach of a person, but after a time they will start away and run into the water, and when it is rough on the beach the little things are beaten down and drowned.—*Asa N. Pillsbury, Jr.*, Passage and Indian Keys Reservations, Florida, Oct. 1, 1908.

ROYAL TERN.—The storm tide which occurred June 14 destroyed nests with eggs, about 30,000 in number, including about 15,000 Royal Terns' eggs, and as the breeding places were low islands the Royal Terns did not re-build thereon, but a few of them went to Battledore Island.—*Wm. M. Sprinkle*, Breton Island Reservation, Louisiana, 1907.

TERNS.—(Under this head are included Common, Arctic and Roseate, which are not readily distinguished by the wardens; also Least Terns). First Terns seen May 20; plenty May 25. The terns did not arrive as early as usual this year, on account of the cold. On July 14 there were plenty of eggs and young. People have remarked that the terns were very plenty this year. The fishermen in this vicinity like very much to have the terns here; they tell me they are as good as a compass, and by them they locate the fish. I have not heard of a single violation this year.—*Geo E. Cushman*, Bluff and Stratton Islands, Maine, 1907.

The terns did not seem to be as many as usual this year, and I soon found that a portion of the colony had joined the one on Fisher's Island, two miles across the bay. A few eggs were trodden by sheep. The birds left this vicinity about the middle of July, somewhat earlier than usual.—*Henry M. Cuskley*, Libby Island, Maine, 1907.

The terns died off badly on account of the cold and lack of food at time of hatching.—*James E. Hall*, Matinicus Rock, Maine, 1907.

The spring was backward, cold and rainy, and most birds were late in nesting. There were as many if not more eggs laid as in

any year since I began to take note of them. Terns are noticeably increasing.—*F. N. Johnson*, Swanns Island, Maine, 1907.

The medrics (terns) came about the usual time and the nests soon had from one to four eggs and in one case five. The nests were very plenty and one had to be very careful not to step on the eggs, lying upon the sand, rocks, grass, and even upon the solid ledges, in some cases rolling down hill. After hatching, the long, cold rains killed some of the young, many birds being found lying about the island.—*Willis Snow*, Metinic Island, Maine, 1907.

There is a herring weir on the north side of the island and the terns come there in large flocks and sit on the weir stakes and binders and get a great many small herring out of the weir. It does not seem to annoy the parties who own the weir. There is a ledge near there where the birds sit at low water and they seem very tame. Power boats can run very near them, and they don't seem at all alarmed, I think they are much more numerous and also gaining the good will of the public.—*Howard T. Ball*, Deer Isle, Maine, 1907.

About 3000 young terns were hatched, of which about 200 died, leaving 2800 reared.—*Emanuel Nelson*, Woods Hole, Mass., 1907.

The terns were later than usual; many young died and many eggs failed to hatch owing to cold and late season.—*Henry O. Rackett*, Gardiner's Island, New York, Sept. 13, 1907.

Least Terns are about extinct here; otherwise, except the Gull-billed Terns, all species are much more abundant within a radius of 20 miles from Smith's Island north than they were three years ago. On a small lump of about one acre, 140 yards from this station, 17 pairs of Common Terns nested this season and laid three eggs each, from the 51 eggs rearing 43 young, but I do not think the other colonies will average as well, as they were not so near to the station, and I could not keep the Crows away, and they eat many eggs and also some young.—*J. R. Andrews*, Cobb's Island, Va., 1907.

We had a heavy rain followed by a second one a day or two afterward, about the second day of August, and I found on the 12th that the young terns had perished by the score; and there seemed to be hundreds of dead young ones, all or nearly all about the same age, and quite a few eggs, dry and unhatched.—*Willis Snow*, Metinic Green Island, Maine, August 27, 1908.

For some reason unknown to me the terns vacated Channel Rock where there were a goodly number last year, and until the middle of July there were no birds to speak of, and only one nest, on Sloop Island Ledge. Since that time they have come to Sloop Island Ledge and built from 20 to 25 nests and raised their young. Since the breeding season was over I have frequently seen large numbers of birds rise from there but none on Channel Rock. I can discover no reason for their leaving Channel Rock; I can not see that they have been disturbed by any one. I think by appearances that they like Sloop Island Ledge and will return there another year. They have increased considerably in numbers since I first became warden, but they have not been as plenty this year as last.—*Howard T. Ball*, Eagle, Maine, Sept. 7, 1908.

In June, at Green Island, there were lots of terns breeding, also on Stratton Island, this year. I don't think the terns have been breeding on Green Island before for years. On Bluff Island the cows in pasture had stepped on some young terns and killed them.—*George E. Cushman*, Bluff and Stratton Islands, Maine, Sept. 1, 1908.

Terns arrived here May 18. The first egg was found June 1; the first young July 1. About 500 young were hatched at the new colony on Foster's Island. Most of the terns have left here and gone further up the bay in pursuit of a small fish called brit on which they feed.—*Henry M. Cuskley*, Bucks Harbor, Maine, Sept. 4, 1908.

The terns have all gone from here, have not seen any since September 14. The approximate number of old birds was about the same as last year but there was an increase of about 150 in young.—*Emanuel Nelson*, Woods Hole, Massachusetts, Sept. 22, 1908.

HERRING GULL.—Some few young died as soon as out of the shell, owing to the extreme cold. Only one old gull died this season.—*Osmond Cummings*, Cone Island, Maine, 1907.

Gulls are getting very tame; they are known to follow the fishermen and seize their trauls for the bait; they even come about the huts when the fishermen are baiting their trauls.—*Dennis Driscoll*, Gotts Island, Maine, 1907.

All Herring Gulls breed on Pulpit Rock and Camp Island, and

terns on Freeman's Rock and Egg Rock. This has been a very good year for all wild birds; no heavy sea to disturb their nests. Very few young died and there has been no eggging to my knowledge. The Indians that have given us some trouble in years past, on Camp Island and Pulpit Rock, have not landed on the islands this year.— *O. B. Hall*, Great Wass Island, Maine, Sept. 14, 1907.

There were about 1400 Herring Gulls, raising about the same number of young. The increase over last year was about 200.— *Fred. E. Small*, Cross Island, Maine, 1907.

It has seemed to me that the proportion of nests with eggs that did not hatch has been larger this year than last, I think owing to the extremely cold spring, but apparently the birds found food more abundant, and they seemed to grow faster and were more hardy. I have found a smaller number of crippled young and old birds this year than ever before. We were visited by an eagle in July and he killed several young gulls before I could drive him off. I have found four gulls that came home to die, being wounded at sea. Aside from young killed by the eagle the greatest number lost were killed by old gulls when one bird's young tried to take the food from another adult.

The gulls came to their nesting grounds on No Mans Land the last of March. The first nest was seen April 15. Young gulls commenced to leave the nesting home August 6. On September 8 all young birds were able to care for themselves.— *Mark Young*, Matinicus Island, Maine, 1907.

Not as many eggs were laid by the gulls this season as heretofore; reason, too much ice on the island this spring. Many of the eggs laid did not hatch on account of cold weather.— *John H. Malone*, Isle Royale, Michigan, 1907.

Have noticed that crows eat gulls' eggs and kill and eat young gulls when small.— *Frank F. Witte*, Huron Island, Michigan, 1907.

There was a very satisfactory increase in the number of nests this year, but the final outcome was very disappointing. The Crows destroyed many of the eggs, and a flock of 32 sheep on my island and 20 more on the adjoining one were a source of much annoyance to the gulls. The weather also was very bad all through the season and the fierce gales and heavy seas killed many of the young birds. After the storm I would find young birds almost as

large as their parents and able to fly strongly, dead among the stones, having been blown or washed in and killed. Unlike other years, the birds seem reluctant to leave, and many are still lingering around their nesting places. They have also exhibited much less fear this year, and on our home island have become quite tame, although they seem to know the difference between ourselves and strangers.—*George C. Jones*, Four Brothers Islands, New York, Sept. 15, 1907.

The gulls arrived here the last of April; the first egg was found May 26; first young, July 1. *Henry M. Cuskley*, Bucks Harbor, Maine, Sept. 4, 1908.

It is very difficult to determine the number of gulls for they have increased wonderfully. We find them in all the harbors and inlets during the day, but at night they return to the Duck Islands. They are doing splendidly and have not been molested at all.—*Dennis Driscoll*, Gotts Island, Maine, September 5, 1908.

There has been abundance of herring all along the coast and the old gulls have been scattered all along the shore. They are very plenty, but they have not laid as many eggs this year as last.—*O. B. Hall*, Jonesport, Maine, Sept. 9, 1908.

The old birds are going fast. The young gulls are in good condition.—*Wm. F. Stanley*, McKinley, Maine, Sept. 8, 1908.

There were more eggs of each species laid this spring than were hatched, owing to the cold spring.—*John H. Malone*, Isle Royal Light Station, Michigan, Sept. 3, 1908.

I do not notice any increase in the number of gulls around this place although a great many were bred here; there do not seem to be any more now than there were this spring, and I can not account for it except that they scatter and go all over. Of course, the hawks and owls kill some, but I have found the remains of only four that I thought were killed in that way.—*John A. McDonald*, Passage Island, Michigan, September 1, 1908.

Arriving at the islands on May 2, several nests were found containing one or two eggs, but none at that time with the full set of three. From then until the middle of the month the nests were built very rapidly, and on May 28 the first young bird was hatched. On this date a careful count showed 327 eggs, which number was increased later by 21, found after the falling water permitted a

more thorough search of the shores. The per cent. of young hatched was very high, as I found not more than 12 eggs unhatched. The general exodus of the birds took place during the last week of August, nearly all being gone by September 1. I estimate that fully 75 eggs were destroyed by Crows. This loss occurred on only one island, which being heavily wooded afforded a place of concealment for the Crows from which they could steal upon the nests while the old birds were away. I found one nest where all three of the eggs had been broken and the contents not yet eaten. Others I found with only two small holes through which the contents had evidently been sucked. I was unable to find any evidence that they destroyed any young birds. Including the eggs destroyed, I estimate the number of eggs laid as 450, which was a very considerable increase over last year. The four islands, containing each about four acres, afford an admirable breeding ground, which should, in time, become a very large colony.—*B. G. Boone*, Four Brothers Islands, N. Y., Nov. 7, 1908.

It is a pleasure for me to report that this has been a very good year for the birds breeding on Old Man Island. The island contains only about 7 acres, which is small for the number of birds breeding there.—*Fred E. Small*, Bucks Harbor, Maine, April 31, 1908.

LEACH'S PETREL.—The Mother Cary's Chickens' nests are in evidence, but of course one can not tell what is within unless the birds are disturbed. A number of years ago I saw a nest dug out, and a very sleepy looking, small, hook-billed bird was found.—*Willis Snow*, Metinic Island, Maine, 1907.

I have previously made mention of the terrible slaughter of petrels by minks upon Western Egg Rock. These minks have caused the petrels to emigrate to Eastern Egg Rock, and the evidence of the slaughter is quite apparent to any one who might visit this place. The gulls have been forced to seek a home in other localities. As soon as the law permits me I shall begin killing the minks in the hope that they may be wholly exterminated before the birds begin to breed again.—*E. E. Bailey*, New Harbor, Maine, August 29, 1908.

Very many petrels have stopped around the island, but none have nested this season.—*Osmond Cummings*, Cone Island, Maine, 1907.

I have not given an account of the Storm Petrel (Leach's), for the reason that it is so difficult to determine the number, as they are abroad only at night, but judging from the number of burrows where they make their nests there are not as many as formerly.—*Dennis Driscoll*, Gotts Island, Maine, September 5, 1908.

There are thousands of the Stormy (Leach's) Petrels here at this writing.—*Wm. F. Stanley*, McKinley, Maine, Sept. 8, 1908.

LAUGHING GULL.—High tides in June destroyed all the eggs, but the gulls rebuilt and there was a large increase over last year.—*R. S. Ludlam*, Stone Harbor, N. J., 1907. (See note of G. D. Hitchens, in the 'General Notes,' below.)

It is 15 miles from this station to the main land; there is a marsh in the middle of this bay ten to twelve miles long and three fourths of a mile wide. On July 11, 1907, while standing on that marsh, looking north and south, a distance, I think, of at least two miles each way, Laughing Gulls and terns were as thick as you ever saw blackbirds, as far as the eye could see, and there were a few Willets. The gulls and terns are equally thick all over the marsh, and as plenty as I have ever known them. I have, with two other men, years ago, taken 1000 eggs a day. It would take 20 days to hunt that marsh over, and when it was hunted over we could begin again and find as many more from the 10th of June to the 25th of July. There is a sandbar across this inlet, about four acres in extent, and rising about eight feet above high tide. Three weeks ago there were over 1000 young Black Skimmers, not yet able to fly; to-day there are over 400 still too young to fly; these birds have been hatching since July 25. There are lots of them flying now, of the first breeding.—*J. E. Johnson*, Hog Island, Virginia, Sept. 16, 1907.

EIDER DUCK.—This has been one of the best seasons for the birds since I have been warden; I do not think they have been disturbed in any way this year. There were about 30 Eider Ducks, raising about 40 young.—*Fred E. Small*, Cross Island, Maine, 1907. (See note by Osmond Cummings under 'General Notes'.)

When I was appointed warden there were two Eider Ducks breeding on the Old Man Island, and at present I have 60. If there were a law to abolish all spring shooting it would be a matter of a short time when we would have a large colony of ducks on this coast.—*Fred. E. Small*, Bucks Harbor, Maine, August 31, 1908.

GENERAL NOTES.— Sandpeeps are here in large numbers, as in preceding years; also plovers of different species. About 1500 Shags (Cormorants) fly in over the island in the morning and out at night. Black Ducks make it a stopping place but none nest; also Eider or Sea Ducks abound in very large numbers.— *Osmond Cummings*, Cone Island, Maine, 1907.

Do you think the mere handling of foliage concealing a nest of young birds will leave a scent upon the leaves or ferns that will attract prowling enemies to the nest and prove the death of the young birds? Last year, deep in the woods, I found a wren's nest near a brook. Brushing aside the ferns to see the nest I found four young, helpless birds. Next day the nest was vacant, not even the mother bird being seen. Did a mink find the nest of young birds and gobble them up, attracted to the place by the scent of my hand upon the foliage? Again, this last June I found a ground-bird's nest near my camp, containing four young birds, entirely helpless. Next day these birds were gone! What happened to them? Did a prowling skunk smell the scent of my hand on the foliage about the nest, investigate, and then find and devour the baby birds? If so, bird lovers must be careful not to handle the foliage about nests, lest by doing so they bring death to the nestlings. I am puzzled to explain these instances in any other way, and I find upon inquiry numbers of my fellow guides have had similar experiences.— *Edgar E. Harlow*, Kineo, Moosehead Lake, Maine, 1907.

There were 15 swallows' nests under the lantern deck of the tower. Last year a Robin built its nest within 20 feet of our 10-inch steam-whistle fog-signal and held the fort.— *Wm. F. Stanley*, Great Duck Island, Maine, 1907.

A large number of duck eggs was spoiled by the cold, late spring, and the second laying was smaller than the first.— *Alfred Eastgate*, Stump Lake Reservation, North Dakota, 1907.

Increase of gulls and terns is hampered by the taking of eggs up to the 20th of June. The slow increase of Willets and Wilson's Plover is due to their being shot after July. The reason of the slow increase of Oystercatchers is that they are early layers and most of the first hatching die from the effects of the cold, wet spring weather.— *G. D. Hitchens*, Smiths Island, Virginia, 1907.

While camping on the Penobscot River recently I saw a Sparrow Hawk pursuing a sandpiper. They came flying down the river, the hawk soon coming close to its intended victim. Suddenly, just as its pursuer swooped down upon it, the sandpiper made a quick turn in the air and dove into the river entirely out of sight. The outwitted hawk at once sheered off into the forest, and a few seconds later the sandpiper rose to the surface of the water fully 20 feet from where it had entered it, and escaped unharmed up the river. I call that a brave little fellow, resourceful and clear-headed almost to the point of reason.—*Edgar E. Harlow*, Kineo, Maine, September 3, 1908.

The birds in my district are all in flocks getting ready to take their southern trip; and I have counted many little flocks and I have not seen a flock, that I could count correctly, but what had more young ones in it than old ones, both gulls and terns. I think this was the best hatch-out of young gulls and terns I have had in years.—*J. R. Andrews*, Oyster, Va., Sept. 3, 1908.

The birds were so numerous this season that it was almost impossible to make any estimate; on the Middle Ground or Little Island Key, a beach of about 100 feet square, the nests were so thick that there was no room at all to land. The same conditions prevailed at Rock Key. These two places do not have beaches at all times; they are rocks covered with water, but some years the sand washes up and makes a sand beach, and if no storm occurs during the season the birds have a good breeding, but if the sand washes away then the eggs are lost, and they have to come here on Sand Key and begin their breeding over again. This was a very successful season; no storm of any account occurred, no eggs were taken or destroyed, and the largest number of birds breed on these places. I visited a few of the islands and found several birds breeding on Man Key, Woman Key, and Ballast Key; on these islands cranes (herons), curlews (ibises), cormorants and pelicans breed. I think it would take all the time of two wardens to protect the birds on this new reservation.—*Chas. G. Johnson*, Key West Reservation, Florida, Sept. 3, 1908.

The small number of plume birds that I had last breeding season, and that I was so proud of, have not returned this season to nest on Sunset Island. I suppose they must have nested somewhere

in the interior and long since been shot. However, I saw a few lately on the breeding ground. I do hope that the flock of Pink Curlews (Roseate Spoonbills) have escaped this summer and will pay me a visit now soon. It is not yet time for the flock of White Pelicans to put in their appearance.—*Columbus G. McLeod*, Placida, DeSota County, Florida, Oct. 1, 1908.

On most parts of the islands, on almost every two square feet was a nest containing 5 or 6 eggs (Laughing Gulls, Brown Pelicans, Black Skimmers, Blue and White Herons, Black-crowned Night Herons).—*Joseph F. Bilos*, Tern Islands Reservation, Louisiana, Sept. 8, 1908.

I think that public sentiment is growing against the killing of the birds; when we first began to look after them the killing of gulls was taken as a matter of course; men out gunning would often bring down a gull just to try their skill; now it is a rare thing that one is killed. People are beginning to feel above it. I am strongly in favor of the abolition of all spring shooting; the birds are gradually diminishing.—*F. N. Johnson*, Swans Island, Maine, August 28, 1908.

Eight years ago I came to this station. At that time there were only two Puffins, specimens having been taken a few years previous to the number of four or five. Since that time the birds had increased to the number of three or four pairs which nested here in 1906. I think specimens must have been taken last year, as I have seen only two of them this summer. The noise from motor boats may have caused them to abandon this locality, however.—*M. E. Tolman*, Matinecus, Maine, Sept. 3, 1908.

All birds except Common Terns are on the increase. There were 14 young Canada Geese raised on the islands this year. Can not give any estimate on ducks, as all sloughs dried up, driving all the young to the big lake.—*Alfred Eastgate*, Stump Lake Reservation, North Dakota, Sept. 6, 1908.

There has been a good increase in all birds this year, as there has been no high tide during the breeding season, and no one disturbed the eggs after the law was out. There are more birds this fall than there has been since I have been warden. Willets are getting quite thick in the fall.—*George D. Hitchens*, Brighton, Virginia, Sept. 1, 1908.

About the last part of May there was a storm and high tides that destroyed many of the Mud Hens' (Clapper Rails) eggs. They laid again, May 25 to 28; high tides drowned many young Marsh Hens. The Black-headed Gull (Laughing Gull) and Strikers (Terns) are as plentiful as last season. The Flood Gulls (Black Skimmers) are on the increase, but the August storm, I think, has drowned many of that bird, as they principally nest on an outer island called Pig Island. I notice this storm has washed that island almost flat, and there are many young ones not yet able to fly.—*J. E. Johnson*, Hog Island, Virginia, August 29, 1908.

I think that the following birds that formerly nested here in numbers are now nesting further south: Willets, Sea-crows (Oystercatchers?) and Black-headed Gulls (Laughing Gulls). I hear that 20 miles down the bay they are spoken of as being unusually abundant. The only bird here that seems more abundant than usual is the Mud Hen (Clapper Rail); there has not been so much eggng done for the last two or three years. Willets, Sea-crows and Black-headed Gulls never did nest as plentifully on this beach as on others further south, possibly because it is so low, and they like higher beaches where there is an abundance of fine shells. About every six or seven years we have a high tide that seems to sweep the shells off the beach.—*Howard F. Jones*, Assateague Beach, Virginia, August 29, 1908.

The increase in Marsh Hens (Clapper Rails) has been very large. It is the opinion of all with whom I have talked that more young of all species have been raised this season than ever before.—*J. A. D. Savage*, Wachapreague, Virginia, Sept. 8, 1908.

The Legislature, repealing the law preventing the shooting of Robin Snipe, was, I think, responsible for the Gulls (Laughing) failing to nest near my station this season, owing to the wholesale shooting of them by residents.—*L. F. Taylor*, Flander Island and Metomkin Beach, Virginia, Sept. 3, 1908.